

A Fiction Lover's Devotional

21 Days
of
Christmas

Stories that
Celebrate God's
Greatest Gift



Study Guide

Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide

21 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS Study Guide
By Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide

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Preface

Storytelling is a cultural tradition that spans countless centuries and includes every tribe and nation. Long before we had books—or anything in a written language, for that matter—one generation shared its legends and lore with the next through storytelling.

Jesus used both true and fictional stories to share his good-news message of reconciliation with God. Sometimes the stories required soul searching and explanation, which encouraged discussion, transparency, and motivation to change. All of His stories had purpose—as do the stories in *21 Days of Christmas*.

The themes and truths within these fictional stories are designed to focus on the reason for the Christmas season: Jesus Christ, God’s greatest gift. The Life Applications provide an opportunity for readers to ponder how the stories apply to their daily lives.

Fiction lovers will enjoy this fresh, fun spin on a devotional. And those who aren’t fans of novels will discover the wonder of seeing how the Holy Spirit can use fiction to touch their hearts and change their lives.

This study guide provides additional questions for each chapter, allowing you to “go deeper.” *21 Days of Christmas*, with or without this study guide, would be an innovative way to observe the Advent season leading up to Christmas—even in a family setting.

In a group format, there is increased opportunity for ministry through sharing and prayer. *21 Days of Christmas* can be used with your women’s group, Bible study, book club, or get-togethers with friends. You and your group members could read and discuss one story a day for three weeks, three stories a day for one week, or whatever pace works best for you.

If you’d like to kick off your journey with a personal visit from the editor/compiler, Kathy Ide, e-mail her at Kathy@KathyIde.com to see if your location is near her or fits with her travel schedule.

Tips for Group Leaders

Here are some ideas for how to lead a group study using *21 Days of Christmas*.

Invite group members to your home for refreshments, or plan to get together at a coffee house or other regular meeting place.

Have everyone read the assigned story or stories prior to coming, or read aloud when you get together if time allows. If the selection has more than two or three characters, consider “dramatizing” the story by assigning a reader to play the part of each character while the rest of the group follows along with silent reading. One person could be the narrator for the sections that are not in dialogue.

After reading, discuss different aspects of the story, such as theme, characters, take-away, etc. Use the questions in this booklet to help you guide the conversation. As the leader, you can select the questions that work best for your group. Don’t feel you have to cover everything.

If your group is a Bible study, we suggest you focus on the questions that direct participants to share Scriptures, compare the fictional story to a biblical story, and/or ponder spiritual applications.

Do your best to keep everyone in the group involved—don’t let one person monopolize or dominate the discussion.

Open and/or close each meeting with prayer. Pray for the needs of the members in your group expressed through the conversations about the stories that you have together.

Discussion Questions

Story #1 Christmas Then and Now by David B. Carl

1. The author offers a compelling perspective of the vast difference between the first Christmas and the modern celebrations of that event in the United States. However, there were many emotions that both couples shared. Name a few.
2. Have you ever felt the pressure of holiday expectations? How did you cope?
3. Sometimes the “worst” Christmas turns out to be the most memorable. Have you ever had such a Christmas? What happened?
4. The Scriptures tell us that God works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). How does this Scripture apply to the family driving through the snow on Christmas Eve?
5. Have you ever considered the reality of the conditions in which Mary delivered her first child, the Son of God? How did this story deepen your appreciation for her courage?
6. God has a specific purpose for everything under His authority. The author suggests several reasons Jesus was born in a filthy stable. What about your circumstances? Could God have a purpose for your difficulties?



Story #2
If Not for Grace
by Lori Freeland

1. It's easy to sympathize with bumbling bachelor Blake and his dilemma. But were you quick to judge that he was in an impossible and impractical situation, and the little girl would be better off in a two-parent family? If so, when did you change your mind?
2. The Scripture says, "And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6 KJV). How did Chloe's childlike faith influence Blake's faltering faith?
3. At what point in the story did you first perceive the influence of God on the outcome?
4. What do you think Blake thought when Samantha said she had to "work" before going to the party in the red cocktail dress? Did your mind rush to judgement, as his did?
5. What Bible story came to mind as you read "If Not for Grace."
6. What do you think might have happened next?



Story #3
The Christmas Child of 1864
by Lena Nelson Dooley

1. This story's historical setting creates tension and interest right away. What elements helped to make this time and place seem realistic to you?
2. What is the purpose of the back-story about Marion's parents? Do you think this information is important—and if so, why?
3. The arrival of strangers on Christmas Eve during a war would cause most people to bolt the door and turn off the lights out of fear. Who was willing to take the risk of opening the door? What does that say about him?
4. At what point in the story did you sense the presence or influence of God?
5. How did faith overcome fear in this story?
6. What Bible story comes to mind that has similar themes to this one (other than the story of Jesus' birth)?
7. How did Joshua use the gospel to comfort the stranger?
8. What changes occurred in Marion's attitude after the arrival of the stranger?



Story #4
Camouflaged Christmas
by Beverly Nault

1. Brooke struggled to accept being alone for the holidays while her husband left on military deployment. Have you ever faced a Christmas that wasn't what you expected? How did you handle the disappointment?
2. How did Penny's attitude about being alone on Christmas differ from Brooke's? When did you first notice Brooke beginning to realize her priorities were skewed to self-absorption?
3. How would the story have been different if Brooke had gone back home when she learned her parents had left town?
4. When Penny described the photograph, Brooke was overcome with emotion once again. How did God work in Brooke's life through this elderly neighbor?
5. Through Penny, God reminded Brooke that she had an important role to play, and her pity party wasn't in His plan. What gift did God give to Brooke on her Florida Christmas? Has He ever reminded you of His bigger plan when you were lost in your troubles?
6. How can we assist the family members of military or other workers who are alone during the holidays?



Story #5
The Christmas Star
by Charles Lober

1. Paige's need to escape was strong enough to compel her go down into the dark, scary basement, even though doing so meant disobeying her mother. What caused this need and why do you think it was so strong?
2. Paige had seen how the parents of other kids involved them in their activities and did fun things with them. From Paige's perspective, her parents didn't measure up in this regard. How do you think she should have handled this?
3. How did the lines of the play Paige read aloud affect her attitude? Why?
4. Light plays an important role in the story. It cut through the darkness, transforming and guiding Paige. How has the light of Christ made a difference in your life?
5. The holiday season can be difficult for people of all ages who are alone. This Christmas, think of ways of reaching out to such people with a visit and/or a meal. And if the opportunity presents itself, share the gospel with them.



Story #6
Jackson's Daughter
by Nancy Williams

1. Could you relate to Jane, dreading a holiday because of grief? How did you get through it? If this applies to you now, how can you get through the Christmas season this year?
2. What events or emotions trigger difficult memories for you?
3. How do you react to insensitive people when you are coping with grief?
4. Name one value that was instilled in you during your childhood. How has that value influenced your relationships as an adult? Would you consider this value a gift?
5. Where do you go for comfort when you experience deep emotional loss?
6. Jane showed gumption when she confronted the funeral director. How did this help her work through her pain?
7. What Bible story comes to mind that supports the message of "Jackson's Daughter"?
8. How can you be more sensitive to those who are grieving this Christmas?



Story #7
The Balsam Walk
by Joanne Bischof

1. Becca's trek to provide a Christmas tree for her family gives us a glimpse into the hardships brought on by poverty. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to go to great lengths to provide for your family (or yourself) during a holiday?
2. When Becca saw Riley, her mind quickly went toward the negative. Why do you think that happened?
3. Were you surprised when Riley offered to tow the heavy tree? Two miles is a long way, right? Did you guess his heart, his motive?
4. At what point in the story did you sense the presence or influence of God on the outcome?
5. Riley offered a personal kind of gift to Becca and her family—the gift of service. Have you ever considered giving Christmas gifts that weren't wrapped in a box and tied with a bow? If so, what did you give?
6. What Scriptures come to mind that support the theme of this story?



Story #8
The Last Ember
by **Linda Bonney Olin**

1. Karen felt mocked by the happy scenes on her Christmas cards. Do you ever resent the holiday festivities around you? Why?
2. What circumstances have you experienced that helped you identify with Karen?
3. Karen longed for tender love, but she did not believe anyone would ever love her with her scars. If someone like Karen confided her despair to you, what would you tell her about her lovability as a “broken” person? Would you tell her about the love of Jesus? What could you say about that?
4. Karen mentioned “Scripture spouters” who pressed her to join their church. Do you think those encounters led her closer to Jesus? Why or why not? Do you respond to people’s difficulties by quoting pertinent Bible verses? Do you find it helpful or annoying when someone offers you a verse in response to your difficulties?
5. During her brief encounter at Karen’s cash register, Frances Dean realized that Karen was close to the breaking point. How do you think she knew that? In real life, is it possible for us to recognize that a person, even a stranger, is suffering from some secret pain? How? Or do you think we should wait for people to confide in us and ask for help?
6. Although we agree in theory that Christians should help others selflessly, we often shy away from strangers in need. How does fear for our own safety and comfort affect our obedience to Jesus’ command to love our neighbors? How would the outcome of “The Last Ember” change if Frances and her grandson were afraid to give Karen the gift of themselves?
7. Do you agree that “It’s never too late for Christmas”? What did that mean to Frances? To Karen? What does it mean to you?
8. What hope does Jesus offer for those who believe themselves to be hopeless? How did Frances and her grandson bring that hope home to Karen?
9. Do you believe you can serve as Jesus’ hands and feet to take His hope to the despairing? What are some practical ways you might do that?



Story #9
Sculpting a Perfect Christmas
by Mary Kay Moody

1. Liz intended her trip to Haven's Home to be a blessing to the residents. Instead, the connection with her mother was a blessing to her. When have you experienced a "boomerang" blessing?
2. Has a child ever guided you to where God wanted you? Share the story.
3. Some answers to prayer are immediate, like Jay's offer to help his aunt Liz. Others require patience. And some are surprise answers to prayers not articulated except in our hearts. What answers to prayer have you experienced in each category?
4. What trappings of Christmas are central to your celebration and why? Does music play a big part? Do you have a special Christmas tradition? Why is it special? When did it begin?
5. Liz's family began performing at Haven's Home after Liz's mother moved there. In what way have you turned a loss into someone else's blessing?
6. Do you have memories that rise over you and crash with the force of a tidal wave? Is a particular holiday more difficult for you because of that? Can you imagine a way God could turn that into peace or joy for you?
7. Sophie interrupted her aunt just as Liz was on her way to head off what she thought would be an explosive disruption. When have you experienced a God-interruption of your plans? Did you realize it at the time or discover it later?
8. Liz was saddened when her mother didn't recognize her. Disappointments are difficult, especially during the holidays. What can you do to help alleviate that for others?
9. Liz's son Davey was sensitive to his grandmother, and he remembered her talent with sculpting clay. How can we teach our children to be sensitive to others?



Story #10
The Box
by Jan Eline

1. Christine cried when the gift she had worked so hard to pay for was gone. How do you handle disappointment when something you want very much is suddenly not available?
2. How does the sacrifice of the mother in this story relate to our Father's love for us? How far have you gone to sacrifice for someone you love?
3. The neighbor, Mrs. MacGregor, played a key role in the plot of this story. How did her surprise affect the outcome of Christine's first Christmas without her papa?
4. What is the usual source of your Christmas gift giving? Monetary? Homemade? Something else?
5. What lesson did Christine learn in this story?



Story #11
Star Light, Star Bright
by Kathy Ide

1. Have you ever thought about the Nativity from Joseph's point of view? What details in this story provided you with a fresh perspective on what he might have gone through and how he felt the night Jesus was born?
2. Does imagining the events of the first Christmas change how you feel about celebrating this event now? In what way(s)?
3. Have you ever felt inadequate to perform a task that you believed God specifically gave you? How did you respond at first? What did you do that helped you accomplish the seemingly insurmountable feat?
4. What kinds of fear have you experienced, and what situations brought on that emotion? How did you handle it?
5. What misconceptions did you have about Jesus before you came to know Him personally? How has your view of God changed as you've spent time becoming more intimate with Him?
6. What skills and talents have you acquired through past experiences that equipped you to do something in the present? Do you believe God allowed you to have those experiences to prepare you for what He wanted to call you to do? What is happening in your life right now that may be part of your "training" for a future calling from the Lord?
7. Have you ever heard a message or instruction from the Holy Spirit that was so powerful it stayed with you through times of discouragement or disappointment? Did you record that moment in some way so you could remind yourself of it later?
8. Have you ever had a calling from God that those around you, even those closest to you, did not understand or believe in? How can you remain faithful to that calling in a void of tangible support from others?
9. Do you sometimes find yourself judging people based on their outer appearance or stories you've heard? How can you change your preconceptions and see others as God sees them—as cherished souls for whom He gave His greatest gift: His Son?



Story #12
A Present Hope
by Lynn Kinnaman

1. Could you relate to Tina's mental rant about the commercialism that has overtaken the true meaning of Christmas? What do you do to resist the urge to spend more and more each year?
2. Have you ever made a personal purchase to boost your spirits during the holidays? Did it work?
3. There are many single, lonely people who struggle during the Christmas season. What can you do to boost someone's spirits this Christmas?
4. Were you surprised when Tina left her coat for Reese? Why or why not?
5. What Bible story comes to mind that has a similar theme to this one?
6. How has God's perfect gift to you made a difference in your life?



Story #13
A Violet Christmas
by Summer Robidoux

1. What is your favorite thing about the Christmas season? Your least favorite thing?
2. Anne discovered that her priorities were misguided. What methods do you use to keep your priorities focused?
3. Have you ever had to take a stand (e.g., at work, at church, with friends) and reprioritize your life? What was the outcome?
4. What are some good strategies to balance work life, home life, and faith? How about for a single working parent?
5. Can you share an example of a “storm” that ended up being a blessing in your life?
6. What are good methods to cope with the stressors of the holidays?
7. God uses many methods (including our children) to teach us lessons. Can you share something (or someone) that God has used in your life?



Story #14
A Decree Went Out
by Barbara Curtis

1. Is shopping for Christmas gifts enjoyable for you or more of an obligation that creates stress?
2. Do you save up all year to be able to afford “big-ticket” items like the ones Logan purchased? Or do you like to create special crafts or foods to give something of yourself?
3. Do you know of anyone like Logan’s grandfather—a widow, widower, shut-in, or an elderly person in a nursing home—who would enjoy a simple visit, not only at Christmastime but throughout the year?
4. How can you incorporate giving of yourself and your time to someone in particular this Christmas season?
5. If someone’s needs interfere with your scheduled plans, do you consider it an inconvenience or an opportunity to serve?
6. How can you honor God this Christmas by showing His love to someone?
7. What will it cost you to seek out an “invitation” to serve others this Christmas?
8. Is there someone in your family you’ve given up on, whom you could pray for to find God’s greatest gift of salvation?
9. In what specific ways can you give thanks to God for His greatest gift: eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 3:23)?



Story #15
Rainbow-Colored Promises
by Kelly Wilson Mize

1. At the beginning of the story, Faith struggled with feelings of depression at what is supposed to be a joyous time of year. Think of a time when you felt excluded from the happiness around you. Did you cry out to God for help or try to handle things on your own? How did that work out for you?
2. Faith's feelings seemed to have power over her life. Do you think feelings have any power over your life? In what ways?
3. What things gave you comfort as a child that still do as an adult?
4. Faith felt the need to be strong for her children. Have you ever succeeded at being strong for others when you were not feeling strong at all? Share the story.
5. Faith was blessed with a loving family. How would the story's ending have been different without the loving presence of her husband and children?
6. Which of God's promises do you cling to when you feel sad, weak, or discouraged?
7. The Bible gives Christians the ultimate hope as expressed in John 1:5, "The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (NIV). What are some areas of darkness in your life that need to be overcome by the light?



Story #16
Doubting Thomas
by Nanette Thorsen-Snipes

1. Being a single parent during the Christmas season is a challenge. When money is tight and families fractured, it's hard to create an atmosphere of peace on earth and good will toward men (Luke 2:14). Tommie Jo was in this situation. What was her dilemma and how did she try to solve it?
2. At what point in the story did you sense God's influence on the outcome?
3. Little Hallie had her mind fixed on a beautiful tree with decorator ornaments. But such a tree was out of the question. How did the homespun tree fill Hallie's need in a different, more meaningful way?
4. How did putting Jesus "in the mix" help bring joy to Tommie Jo and Hallie?
5. What Scriptures come to mind that speak to this theme?



Story #17
A Family to Hope For
by Marilyn Hilton

1. Tony was driving on a dark, lonely, and uncertain road. Caroline was celebrating Christmas Eve with her children but missing her deceased husband. Which character did you relate to more, and why?
2. Have you ever wished you had someone else's life, as Tony did? What were the circumstances of your own life? of the other person's?
3. Have you ever asked God to change a situation you didn't want to be in? How did He respond? Did the situation change, or did you change?
4. Caroline sensed that Tony was trustworthy, and she invited him inside her house. Have you ever felt God's presence or guidance in a situation, which changed what you would normally have said or done?
5. What do you think happened to Tony and Caroline after the story ended? Why?
6. Describe what this line from the story means to you: "Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?"
7. Caroline's children believed God would send them a new daddy. What are you hoping for this Christmas?



Story #18
Home for Christmas
by Esther G. Seim

1. Before talking to Miss Millie, Addisyn had never heard the true meaning of Christmas. What are some ways that you can use the Christmas season to witness to others about our Savior's birth and sacrifice?
2. Miss Millie looked for Addisyn relentlessly and refused to give up until she had brought her home. How is this similar to the way that God pursues us?
3. How does Miss Millie's attitude apply to the way we should pursue others for Christ?
4. What verses came to your mind as you read "Home for Christmas"?
5. At the end, Addisyn was able to soften Mrs. Fournier's heart by simply telling her that Jesus loved her. How was such a simple action able to make a difference?
6. What are some simple ways you can demonstrate God's love to people you spend time with every day?
7. Many people like Addisyn don't have hope. How can you reach out to someone like her this Christmas?



Story #19
All I Want for Christmas
by Glenda Joy Race

1. In the midst of all your Christmas decorating and preparations, do you ever stop to think about servicemen or missionaries who are out of the country—even in places that do not celebrate Christmas? How did this story change your perspective on those living and serving abroad?
2. Even though Lori loved her students and her job, the cultural challenges often got on her nerves. Have you ever experienced this kind of “homesickness”? How did you cope?
3. Through the video, Lori was able to share her family and her culture with the students and teachers at the school and create a bridge of friendship. What can you do to build a bridge between yourself and someone in a foreign country?
4. Lori began the story with a somewhat disgruntled attitude, which is normal for expatriates. Nevertheless, the story ended with her heart overflowing with gratitude. What changed Lori’s outlook?



Story #20
A White Christmas with You
by Rachael Landis

1. Can you relate to Nicole when she felt lonely around the holidays? Share a time when loneliness seemed like your only friend and how you handled that feeling.
2. What would you have done about your loneliness if you were Nicole? List some ideas to encourage yourself or others during hard times.
3. What do you think would have happened to Nicole if she hadn't met Grace? Share some ideas on dealing with disappointment in God.
4. God created human beings for relationships with Himself and others. When has God provided a friend when you needed someone most?
5. What does Scripture say about loneliness and disappointment? Find some pertinent Bible verses and pray them over your life.
6. Without knowing it, Grace encouraged Nicole and reminded her of God's love, even in the lonely times. One of the main messages of the Bible is God's strong redeeming love. What is a practical way you can show that love to someone today?



Story #21
Guiding Star
by Sarah Earlene Shere

1. Which character in this story did you most identify with: Joe or Maria or Pastor Gabe? Why?
2. Distracted with his own thoughts, Joe wandered into an area of town that many people would try to avoid, either out of fear or out of prejudice. What keeps you from reaching out to those less fortunate than yourself? What Scriptures provide clues as to how we can cross borders and touch lives with the love of Jesus?
3. In spite of Maria's outward circumstances of poverty and disability, she freely shared her talent with anyone who passed her way. What can you share with others in order to bless them? In what unlikely places might you look to find a blessing?
4. There are many wonderful traditions and symbols associated with Christmas. But these things can also be distractions from the reason for the season. What traditions and/or symbols of Christmas help you focus on the true meaning of this holy day?
5. Joe learned much from an honest, innocent child. What are some lessons you have learned from a child?
6. Pastor Gabe mentioned "the hope of Christmas." What hope was he talking about? How did Jesus' birth change the future of the world? How has it changed you?



Wrap up

1. Have you enjoyed this study of *21 Days of Christmas: Stories that Celebrate God's Greatest Gift*? What did you like most? What could have been done differently to make it better? (If this is a group study, share your ideas with the leader or other members.)
2. Which story was your favorite? Why?
3. The next time you read a novel or a short fiction story, will you read it differently? Will you be more likely to look for ways the characters and situations apply to your life and circumstances?
4. How can encourage others by sharing the blessings you received from this study guide and/or the devotional? Would you consider visiting www.FictionDevo.com and posting something on the forum for *21 Days of Christmas*? Or going to facebook.com/FictionDevo and sharing your thoughts there?
5. Would you like to do a group study for other books in this series? Which one do you think you would enjoy most: *21 Days of Grace: Stories that Celebrate God's Unconditional Love*, *21 Days of Love: Stories that Celebrate Treasured Relationships*, or *21 Days of Joy: Stories that Celebrate Motherhood*?